

# MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

## Success Stories from the Field

### Specialty Ceramics Inc

#### Ohio Manufacturing Extension Partnership

#### Strategy and Improvement Initiatives Lead to Integration and Market Success for Specialty Ceramics

##### Client Profile:

Specialty Ceramics is the largest manufacturer of vacuum-formed ceramic fireplace log sets in North America. Specialty Ceramics was the first manufacturer in the country to vacuum form gas fireplace logs from refractory ceramic materials, a process that transformed them from decorative hearth pieces into innovative heating appliances. Located in Columbiana, Ohio, the company employs 100 people.

##### Situation:

Specialty Ceramics often works with its sister companies, Refractory Specialties, and VacuForm, Inc. Although all three companies manufacture vacuum-formed ceramic products, each company faces different problems competing in different markets. Specialty Ceramics has the advantage of a mature product, but was hindered by manufacturing difficulties and shrinking business markets. Refractory Specialties and VacuForm thrived by constantly increasing their product lines with innovative products, yet neither company had control over a specific market. Wanting to improve the integration between the three companies, TechSolve, a NIST MEP network affiliate, was enlisted to help the trio discover and address barriers to growth through strategic planning.

##### Solution:

TechSolve began by identifying shared ideologies and articulating a vision for the future, analyzing the competitive environment of each company, defining near-term goals and objectives, and determining key obstacles and constraints. Once it became clear why many of the group's problems existed, TechSolve was able to guide the companies towards a more integrated and, subsequently, more successful future. To accomplish this, Specialty Ceramics implemented a series of manufacturing improvement initiatives that positioned the company to improve lead time, improve quality, and reduce rework. Ultimately, TechSolve was able to help the group create a plan that would simultaneously enhance the efficiency, quality, and profitability of all three companies.

##### Results:

- \* Increased lead time by 64 percent.
- \* Improved first-pass product quality by 33 percent.
- \* Reduced rework by 50 percent.

##### Testimonial:

"TechSolve helped our family of companies to overcome a silo mentality. Through their strategic planning process, they helped us to define the opportunities and challenges across all three of our businesses and consider them as a whole, thus enabling us to make win-win improvements across all

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three by strategically leveraging our own resources."

Rich Wilk, Operations Manager